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SUBJECT: JUNTA BLOCKS TEXT MESSAGES

REF: CONAKRY 00493

¶1. Several text messages asking Guinea's youth to unite against CNDD President Moussa Dadis Camara have been circulating in the capital since the Aug 20 USG press release, and subsequent GOG statement, on elections and Dadis as a potential candidate (reftel). One message received by A/DCM contained anti-Dadis slogans like "Everyone unite, hand in hand, like in January 2007" and "Chase this dictator who is in the process of being born. Join the movement for Dadis to leave." According to sources, messages such as this have been widely distributed, particularly among the youth.

¶2. Beginning Tuesday night, all text messages were blocked from transmission. Services remain unavailable as of Wednesday morning. News sources are reporting that the CNDD ordered the cellular companies to shut down their texting services as a way of stopping anti-Dadis text messages from spreading.

¶3. Embassy contacted the four major cellular companies in Guinea to inquire about the service cancellation. While one company claimed that they unilaterally decided to shut down their SMS service for the time being, another company said that they are experiencing "technical problems" with their SMS service and are working on fixing the problem. Overall, the representatives seemed cautious about discussing the subject over the phone.

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COMMENT  
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¶4. The reported blocking of text messages as a way to quell organization by Guinea's youth. SMS messaging is a prime form of communication for Guineans, as it is much less expensive than a phone call and can be transmitted despite spotty service zones. In the interior of the country, where cell phone service is very irregular, SMS messaging is sometimes the only means of phone communication. For politically active groups, SMS messaging provides a cheap and easy way to disperse messages and organize quickly. Without texting capabilities, political groups may have a harder time communicating across organizations.

¶5. If the military did block these text messages is yet another sign of Dadis, growing assertion of power over the Guinean populace and private business. It is also a blatant violation of free speech. During the 2007 riots in Conakry, the GOG ordered a similar end of SMS services. However, only two of the four main companies stopped services at the time.  
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